

Grant Continuation Report from Task Force

Recommendation: Forward with recommendation to award funding and AmeriCorps member slots requested. Maine Conservation Corps is urged to strengthen their argument for increasing funding and cost per member in the third year.

Legal Applicant: Department of Agriculture,
Conservation and Forestry

Program Name: Maine Conservation Corps

Category: ☐ AC Formula
☒ AC Competitive
☐ Other Competition

Type: ☐ Planning
☐ Operating
☒ Fixed Price
☐ Ed Award Only

Year in Grant Cycle: ☐ Year 1 ☐ Year 2 ☒ Year 3

Continuation Dates: 1/1/2021 to 12/31/2021

*The AmeriCorps State Competitive application has to be submitted 1 full year in advance of the performance period for this grant. Funds will be awarded to the Commission 6 months after submission but Conservation Corps operates on a January-December cycle so the award of funds to the program is 6 months after the Commission gets the funds. In practical terms this means the program is applying for year 3 funding when it is just about to complete year 1 (Jan-Dec 2019). Year 2 starts Jan 2020.

New Resources Requested for Continuation: Funds and Slots

	CNCS	% change from 2020
Fixed Amount Request	760,969	↑15.3%
Cost-per-member proposed (max allowed \$15,479)	\$15,479	↑15.3%

In a fixed-amount grant, the view into the local contribution to the project is through the listing of sources of other funds that will be used to operate. This program has a detailed listing of local resources to operate that totals \$1,369,172 from partners' cash and in-kind plus an amount from the general fund.

Total AmeriCorps Member Service Years: 49.16		Slot Types Requested						
	Terms of Service (hrs)	1700	1200	900	675	450	300	Total
	Slots	8		27	59	10	12	116

Program Description (executive summary from grant application):

The Maine Conservation Corps proposes to have 116 AmeriCorps members who will complete vital environmental stewardship activities throughout the State of Maine, with a focus on counties exhibiting the highest levels of poverty and simultaneously the lowest population levels. AmeriCorps members will be both the providers and beneficiaries of service, completing stewardship initiatives, while receiving job training and skill development. At the end of the first program year, the AmeriCorps members will be responsible for treating or constructing 200 miles of trail with 40 disadvantaged individuals completing job readiness training as AmeriCorps members. In addition, the AmeriCorps members will leverage 700 community volunteers who will be engaged in skill development activities to perpetuate the stewardship efforts of members. This program will concentrate on the CNCS focus areas of Environmental Stewardship and Economic Opportunity. The CNCS investment of \$760,969 will be matched with \$644,699 in public funding and \$614,480 in private funding and \$109,993 of in-kind contributions.

Continuation Rationale for Significant Increase in Cost-per-MSY request:

Along with the expansion of slots, MCC is requesting an increase in cost per MSY to \$15,479. Worker's compensation rates have nearly doubled from the time of the original grant application; healthcare coverage

has also increased; and lack of funds to secure housing and basic essentials is the most frequent rationale for candidates declining a term of service.

Service locations for the 2019-2020 year (no change in sites proposed; BP&L= Bureau of Park and Lands; SP= State Park):

- BP&L Mt. Blue SP
- BP&L Mt. Blue SP/ Tumbledown Public Lands
- BP&L Sebago Lake Park
- BP&L Vaughan Woods Memorial SP
- BP&L Wolfe's Neck Woods State Park
- Cumberland County Soil and Water Conservation
- DEP: Augusta Biomonitoring
- DEP: Portland Healthy Beaches
- Downeast Institute
- Frenchman Bay Conservancy
- Maine Natural Areas Program
- Midcoast Conservancy
- Maine Conservation Corps Field Teams (note locations of field team activity are not registered in data systems)

NOTE! All performance assessment that follows is based on the 9 months of the first year (2019) of a 3-year grant. The final quarter report (Oct-Dec) for year 1 is not due until Jan 2020. Thus, there is no performance data for the *new program model* funded for Sept 2019 through August 2022. The assessment data (past performance) below does reinforce as positive the program's decision to alter the model so as to hit targets including enrollment.

Performance measures:

	2018-19 Target	2018-19 Actual	2019-20 Target	2020-21 Target
<u>Service Activities</u>				
• EN5: Number of miles of trails or rivers (owned/maintained by national, state, county, city or tribal governments) that are improved and/or created	200	198.2		200
• EN5.1: Number of miles of trails or rivers (owned/maintained by governments or nonprofits for public use or public easements) that are improved and/or put into use.	180	189.4		180
• O12: Number of economically disadvantaged participants unemployed prior to service	40	27	CNCS directed program + Commission to remove this measure for yrs 2+3 as they are no longer tracking result	
• OUTCM53179: Number of individuals who are employed, continue education, enter military or national service	35	Report in Jan 2020		
<u>Member Development</u>				
• M1: Number of AmeriCorps program training and other formal development activities that result in increased AmeriCorps member skills, knowledge and abilities related to the service assignment (community, tasks, and sector).	1	1	Under negotiation now; new contract due 12/19	TBD
• M2: Number of AmeriCorps members demonstrating increased competency in skills or application of knowledge	25	16	Under negotiation now; new contract due 12/19	TBD
<u>Capacity Building</u>				
• G3-3.8: Hours of service contributed by community volunteers who were managed by AmeriCorps members or program	3500	2036.5	Under negotiation now; new contract due 12/19	TBD

	2018-19 Target	2018-19 Actual	2019-20 Target	2020-21 Target
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> G3-3.2: Number of community volunteers managed by organizations or participants 	700	553	Under negotiation now; new contract due 12/19	TBD
G3-3.3: Number of organizations fully implementing three or more new effective volunteer management practices as a result of capacity building services provided by AmeriCorps members or program	20	Report in Jan 2020	Under negotiation now; new contract due 12/19	TBD

¹CNCS does not allow programs to enter these performance measures in federal application system. Targets set after award but before first report.

Operating performance summary:

Enrollment/retention.

	Total MSYs	1700 hr	900 hr	675 hr	450 hr	300 hr
Original Award	49.16	10	20	71	8	0
Current after <u>1</u> instances of slot conversions	49.11	10	17	48	21	32
Enrollment to-date (76.6% filled)	42.47	10	17	49*includes one refill	12	10
Exited before service term complete (89/8% retention rate – AmeriCorps standard is minimum 85%)	4.67	1	2	7		

Compliance:

» Overall the program operation is successful, and the program staff are responsive and thorough with documentation requests. Communication continues to be prompt and site visits were informative. There was one significant instance on non-compliance having to do with a late criminal history check on new staff. The issue was self-reported and corrected.

» Member management

- There are actually two segments of the program: Environmental Stewards and Field Teams. Both are well supported but the Field Teams get the majority of community attention as well as showcasing by the program.
- MCC has all Member role descriptions in OnCorps and is using the timekeeping system fully. All timesheets are reviewed and processed on time.
- Conservation Corps does extensive training for members yet opted to only measure the impact of the resume training they did for field team members. Grantees still struggle to assess the quality of their training and its relationship to how well the members can perform the service.

» Program Finances and Agency Fiscal Issues

- Fiscal program staff are timely and very responsive for any requests for documents or verification of financial data. There have been no outstanding issues.
- It should be noted this grantee is one of 2 covered by the 2-year OIG audit. They have been patient and responsive, meeting deadlines, to the recent spate of 8 successive requests for significant amounts of documentation between June and November 2019. Often the requests were repeats of items provided during the on-site contractor visit in October/November 2018. There is still no exit conference scheduled.

Community Awareness:

Conservation Corps leadership did two programs (“road shows”) to explain their mission and service partnership options to new partners. They report these were well attended.

Other comments:

Fixed amount grants do not submit full budgets and are exempt from financial reporting. Reimbursement is based on enrollment and time served by members so the program needs to fully enroll and meet retention targets. In the first year of this grant cycle, MCC’s enrollment/retention performance will likely result in not drawing at least \$94,000.

Task Force Review Summary:

Task Force Continuation Recommendation	Authorize Proposal	Modify: Increase	Modify: Decrease	Deny Request
Budget	X			
AmeriCorps MSYs and slots	X			
Performance targets	X			
Operating plans	X			

Comments:

- Very solid proposal and history of successful outcomes.
- Program has historically performed well and while it has been unable to fill all slots, has done relatively well in comparison with others and has suggested slot reconfiguration to assist in filling positions.
- Effective volunteer management practices.
- Support their efforts to expand their measurements into the stewardship element of the proposal